

**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA**

**FELIX M. RODRIGUEZ,**  
**Plaintiff,**

**v.**

**ERIE COUNTY PRISON,**  
**Defendant.**

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**Civil Action No. 10-115Erie**

**Magistrate Judge Susan Paradise Baxter**

**MEMORANDUM OPINION<sup>1</sup>**

Magistrate Judge Susan Paradise Baxter

**A. Relevant Procedural History**

Plaintiff, acting pro se, filed the instant civil rights action on May 11, 2010. Plaintiff names only “Erie County Prison” as a Defendant to this action and asserts that he is entitled to financial compensation for pain and suffering incurred while incarcerated there in March of 2010. Liberally construing the complaint, this Court believes that Plaintiff is complaining that necessary medications were withheld from him during his incarceration. ECF No. 4.<sup>2</sup>

In response to the Complaint, Defendant Erie County Prison has filed a motion to dismiss. Alternatively, Defendant requests that this Court order Plaintiff to file a more definite

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<sup>1</sup> In accordance with the provisions of 28 U.S.C. § 636(c)(1), the parties have voluntarily consented to have a United States Magistrate Judge conduct proceedings in this case, including the entry of a final judgment. ECF Nos. 2, 12.

<sup>2</sup> The nineteenth edition to The Bluebook: A Uniform System of Citation (Columbia Law Review Ass’n, et al. eds., 19<sup>th</sup> ed. 2010) provides citation form for court documents filed with the Electronic Case Management system of the federal courts. Rule B7.1.4. Although The Bluebook advises pinpoint citation to a document’s original page number, this Court finds its practice of citing to the page number contained in the PACER header more efficient and will continue its prior practice of citing to that page number herein.

statement. See ECF No. 9. Plaintiff has filed an Opposition to the pending motion. ECF No. 17, “Notice to Continue.”<sup>3</sup>

## **B. Standards of Review**

### **1) Pro Se Litigants**

*Pro se* pleadings, “however inartfully pleaded,” must be held to “less stringent standards than formal pleadings drafted by lawyers.” Haines v. Kerner, 404 U.S. 519, 520-521(1972). If the court can reasonably read pleadings to state a valid claim on which the litigant could prevail, it should do so despite failure to cite proper legal authority, confusion of legal theories, poor syntax and sentence construction, or litigant’s unfamiliarity with pleading requirements. Boag v. MacDougall, 454 U.S. 364 (1982); United States ex rel. Montgomery v. Bierley, 141 F.2d 552, 555 (3d Cir. 1969)(petition prepared by a prisoner may be inartfully drawn and should be read “with a measure of tolerance”); Smith v. U.S. District Court, 956 F.2d 295 (D.C.Cir. 1992); Freeman v. Dep’t of Corrections, 949 F.2d 360 (10th Cir. 1991). Under our liberal pleading rules, during the initial stages of litigation, a district court should construe all allegations in a complaint in favor of the complainant. Gibbs v. Roman, 116 F.3d 83 (3d Cir. 1997). See, e.g., Nami v. Fauver, 82 F.3d 63, 65 (3d Cir. 1996)(discussing Fed.R.Civ.P. 12(b)(6) standard); Markowitz v. Northeast Land Co., 906 F.2d 100, 103 (3d Cir. 1990)(same). Because Plaintiff is a *pro se* litigant, this Court may consider facts and make inferences where it is appropriate.

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<sup>3</sup> Petitioner’s entire Opposition brief reads as follows: “I Felix M. Rodriguez-Urtena would like to continue the case because I feel I was not treated properly while incarcerated [sic] at the Erie County Prison. My medications were [sic] not properly given to me until 32 days after when the County Prison had proof that I had medications to take on a daily basis for: 1) high blood pressure, 2) thyroid, 3) heart arethmia [sic], and 4) pain meds for abses [sic] on neck and stomach.” ECF No. 17.

## **2) Motion to dismiss pursuant to 12(b)(6)**

A motion to dismiss filed pursuant to Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(b)(6) must be viewed in the light most favorable to the plaintiff and all the well-pleaded allegations of the complaint must be accepted as true. Erickson v. Pardus, 551 U.S. 89, 93-94 (2007). A complaint must be dismissed pursuant to Rule 12 (b)(6) if it does not allege “enough facts to state a claim to relief that is plausible on its face.” Twombly, 550 U.S. at 570 (rejecting the traditional 12 (b)(6) standard set forth in Conley v. Gibson, 355 U.S. 41 (1957)). See also Ashcroft v. Iqbal, \_\_\_ U.S. \_\_\_, 129 S.Ct. 1937 (2009) (specifically applying Twombly analysis beyond the context of the Sherman Act).

A Court need not accept inferences drawn by a plaintiff if they are unsupported by the facts as set forth in the complaint. See California Pub. Employee Ret. Sys. v. The Chubb Corp., 394 F.3d 126, 143 (3d Cir. 2004) citing Morse v. Lower Merion Sch. Dist., 132 F.3d 902, 906 (3d Cir. 1997). Nor must the Court accept legal conclusions set forth as factual allegations. Twombly, 550 U.S. at 555, citing Papasan v. Allain, 478 U.S. 265, 286 (1986). See also McTernan v. City of York, Pennsylvania, 577 F.3d 521, 531 (3d Cir. 2009) quoting Iqbal, \_\_\_ U.S. at \_\_\_, 129 S.Ct. at 1949 (“The tenet that a court must accept as true all of the allegations contained in a complaint is inapplicable to legal conclusions.”). A plaintiff’s factual allegations “must be enough to raise a right to relief above the speculative level.” Twombly, 550 U.S. at 556, citing 5 C. Wright & A. Miller, Federal Practice and Procedure § 1216, pp. 235-236 (3d ed. 2004). Although the United States Supreme Court does “not require heightened fact pleading of specifics, [the Court does require] enough facts to state a claim to relief that is plausible on its face.” Id. at 570.

In other words, at the motion to dismiss stage, a plaintiff is “required to make a ‘showing’ rather than a blanket assertion of an entitlement to relief.” Smith v. Sullivan, 2008 WL 482469, at \*1 (D. Del.) quoting Phillips v. County of Allegheny, 515 F.3d 224, 231 (3d Cir. 2008). “This ‘does not impose a probability requirement at the pleading stage,’ but instead ‘simply calls for enough facts to raise a reasonable expectation that discovery will reveal evidence of’ the necessary element.” Phillips, 515 F.3d at 234, quoting Twombly, 550 U.S. at 556 n.3.

The Third Circuit has expounded on the Twombly/Iqbal/Phillips line of cases:

To prevent dismissal, all civil complaints must now set out ‘sufficient factual matter’ to show that the claim is facially plausible. This then ‘allows the court to draw the reasonable inference that the defendant is liable for the alleged misconduct.’

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[A]fter Iqbal, when presented with a motion to dismiss for failure to state a claim, district courts should conduct a two-part analysis. **First, the factual and legal elements of a claim should be separated. The district court must accept all of the complaint’s well-pleaded facts as true, but may disregard any legal conclusions. Second, a district court must then determine whether the facts alleged in the complaint are sufficient to show that the plaintiff has a ‘plausible claim for relief.’ In other words, a complaint must do more than allege the plaintiff’s entitlement to relief.** A complaint has to ‘show’ such an entitlement with its facts. As the Supreme Court instructed in Iqbal, ‘[w]here the well-pleaded facts do not permit the court to infer more than the mere possibility of misconduct, the complaint has alleged - but it has not shown - that the pleader is entitled to relief.’ This ‘plausibility’ requirement will be a context-specific task that requires the reviewing court to draw on its judicial experience and common sense.

Fowler v. UPMC Shadyside, 578 F.3d 203, 210-11(3d Cir. 2009) (emphasis added) (internal citations omitted).

#### **D. Immunity**

Plaintiff seeks monetary damages from the Erie County Prison. The Eleventh Amendment proscribes actions in the federal courts against states, their agencies, and state officials acting within their official capacities. Laskaris v. Thornburgh, 661 F.2d 23 (3d Cir. 1981)(Pennsylvania); Mt. Healthy City Board of Education v. Doyle, 429 U.S. 274 (1977) (state agencies); Edelman v. Jordan, 415 U.S. 651 (1974) (state employees acting in their official capacity). The only ways that a state may be sued in federal court are if (1) the state has waived its Eleventh Amendment immunity (Kentucky v. Graham, 473 U.S. 159 (1985)), or (2) Congress has made it unmistakably clear in either the language of a statute or in its legislative history that it is its intention to permit such suits (Board of Trustees of the University of Alabama v. Garrett, 531 U.S. 356 (2001)). Thus, unless Erie County Prison has consented to suit here or the Congress has expressly abrogated this institution's Eleventh Amendment immunity, neither of which has occurred, the claims against the Erie County Prison must be dismissed as Plaintiff has failed to state a claim upon which relief may be granted.

In addition, entities acting under color of state law cannot be held liable under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 on a *respondeat superior* theory. See Monell v. Department of Social Services, 436 U.S. 658 (1978) (superiors of line officers who act in violation of constitutional rights may not be held liable on a theory of vicarious liability merely because the superior had a right to control the line officer's action); Robinson v. City of Pittsburgh, 120 F.3d 1286, 1293-1295 (3d Cir. 1997). To state a viable claim under section 1983 against Erie County Prison, Plaintiff must allege that he was injured as the result of a "policy or custom" of this entity-defendant. Monell, 436 U.S. 691. A "[p]olicy is made when a 'decisionmaker possess[ing] final authority to establish municipal policy with respect to the action' issues an official proclamation, policy or edict." Andrews v.

City of Philadelphia, 895 F.2d 1469, 1480 (3d Cir. 1990). A custom “can be proven by showing that a given course of conduct, although not specifically endorsed or authorized by law, is so well-settled and permanent as virtually to constitute law.” Bielevicz v. Dubinon, 915 F.2d 845, 850 (3d Cir. 1990). Plaintiff’s complaint contains no allegations that a custom or policy of the Erie County Prison led to any claimed injuries. Erie County Prison is named as a defendant simply as the entity-in-charge and thus, Plaintiff’s complaint fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted.

An appropriate order follows.

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**Civil Action No. 10-115Erie**

**Magistrate Judge Susan Paradise Baxter**

**O R D E R**

AND NOW, this 10th day of March, 2011;

IT IS HEREBY ORDERED that the motion to dismiss filed by Defendant Erie County Prison [ECF No. 8] is GRANTED.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that the Clerk of Courts is directed to close this case.

/s/ Susan Paradise Baxter  
SUSAN PARADISE BAXTER  
United States Magistrate Judge